

ForumCiv's policy on the role of civil society in the democratisation process

Decided by: The ForumCiv board
Date of decision: 18 February 2013
Period of validity: Until further notice
Responsible: Secretary General

ForumCiv’s definition of civil society:

Civil society comprises groups of people, distinct from the state, political parties, individual households and businesses, acting together to achieve non-profit objectives. Civil society is organised at a local, regional and global level and includes popular movements, networks, foundations, institutes, loosely organised groups, etc.

Application of the policy

ForumCiv’s policy platform for 2013-2022 describes the organisation’s vision as “a just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change”. It establishes that civil society organisations (CSOs) play a key role in the process of change that must take place globally if we are to achieve our vision, and identifies the possible roles and key functions of civil society.

This policy directs ForumCiv’s choice of partners and organisations with which to cooperate, and aims to clarify ForumCiv’s opinions about how CSOs should act individually and jointly to contribute to the democratisation process.

ForumCiv’s official positions, guidelines and plans of operations are to be consistent with this policy. The board has responsibility for ensuring compliance with the policy, and the Secretary General reports back to the board on the monitoring of compliance in connection with the follow-up of the plan of operation.

Civil society organisations

ForumCiv believes that if civil society is to promote democracy and development, its organisations should:

- be representative and legitimate
- be transparent, democratically led and tolerant
- build structures and capacity so that democratic values inform their practical operations

- create opportunities for people living in poverty to influence their lives and social development
- prioritise the ability of marginalised people to organise to secure their influence and rights
- redress power imbalances and build upon the principle of non-discrimination
- cooperate and network with other players to become a stronger voice for democracy and to influence the political agenda.

Partnership

ForumCiv believes that if civil society is to promote democracy and development, cooperation between its organisations should:

- be based on equality and mutuality of partnership and ownership
- have shared, open and democratic decision-making processes
- visibilise and discuss any power imbalances between the partners
- comply with the Istanbul principles for CSO development effectiveness¹.

Civil society and the government

ForumCiv believes that a working democratic and just society needs an involved, active and responsible government with democratically governed institutions and transparency in the exercise of official authority. It must guarantee the freedoms of association and expression as well as provide for independent media and popular participation in democratic processes.

ForumCiv believes that civil society organisations, vis-à-vis government, should:

¹The eight Istanbul principles adopted in September 2010 are to: 1. Respect and promote human rights and social justice 2. Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girl's rights. 3. Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation. 4. Promote environmental sustainability 5. Practice transparency and accountability 6. Pursue equitable partnership and solidarity 7. Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning. 8 Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

- influence and monitor policy in relation to its undertakings at all levels of society based on the principle of non-discrimination
- serve as an advocate and as a channel for popular participation in democratic processes even when also taking on the task of implementing political decisions and meeting urgent social service needs
- cooperate, wherever possible, in the defence of democracy and human rights.

Civil society and political parties

ForumCiv believes that civil society organisations, vis-à-vis political parties, should:

- remain independent and unaffiliated
- be encouraged to engage in continual dialogue – with both government and opposition parties – particularly on issues relating to democratisation, human rights, global justice and environmentally sustainable development
- promote democratic partyism and democratic culture where they are underdeveloped.

Civil society and business

ForumCiv regards the business sector as an actor in sustainable environmental, economic and social development when companies protect and promote respect for human rights around the world.

ForumCiv believes that civil society has an important part to play in ensuring that companies operate in a manner that:

- contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development
- promotes union rights
- promotes equality between women and men
- contributes to a transition to renewable energy and ecological sustainability
- contributes to the democratisation process.

The role of civil society in armed conflicts

ForumCiv works for a just peace – a state characterised by democracy, respect for human rights and the absence of violence.

Organisations seeking to promote peace in conflict zones should:

- improve their knowledge and awareness of the meaning and significance of the conflict
- assert basic human values and principles of justice
- endeavour to ensure that discriminated groups are guaranteed participation in peace processes
- endeavour to ensure that women are guaranteed participation in peace processes in accordance with UN resolution 1325
- document human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law.